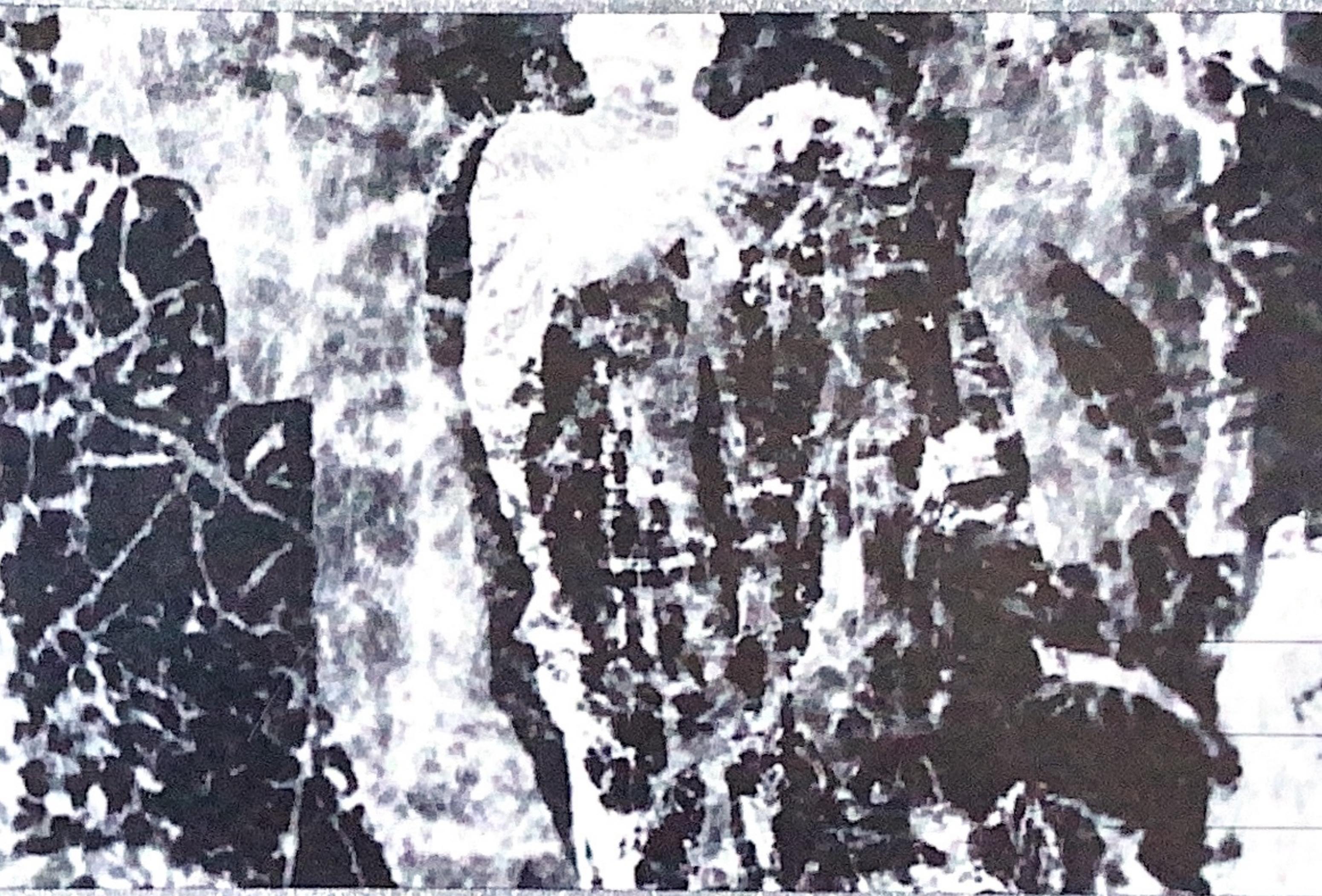


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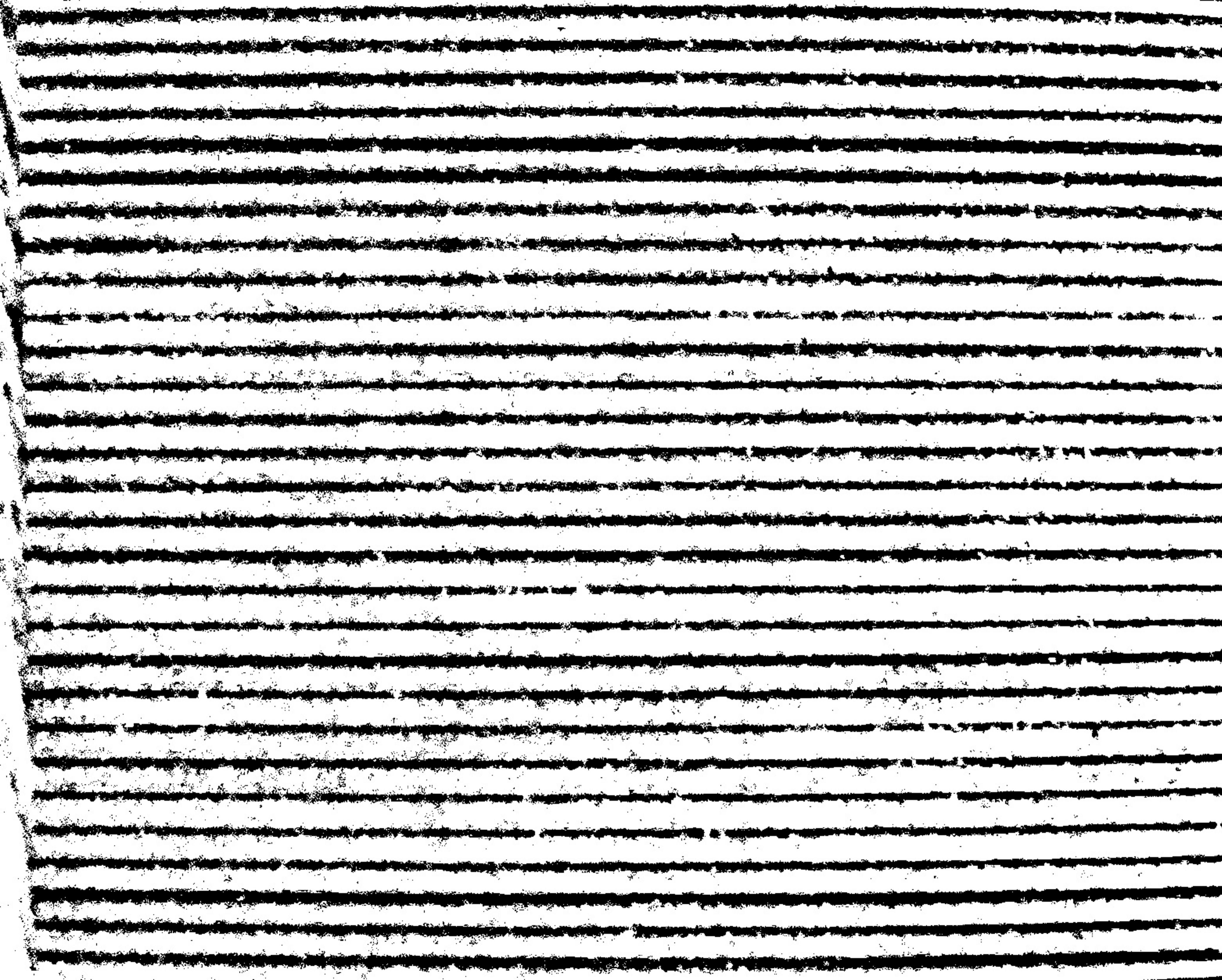


*Joseph*

*Mechtatal*

*Paintings*

*1986-1987*



*Joseph Nechvatal*

*Paintings: 1986-1987*

*February 9 through March 20, 1988*

University Galleries  
Illinois State University  
Normal IL 61761

## ***Acknowledgements***

This exhibition and catalogue were made possible through the involvement and generosity of many people. I would like to thank the collectors who agreed to loan paintings: Fred Alger Management, Speyer Family Collection, Noel Vietor, and a private collection. Thanks are due, also, to Brooke Alexander, for his enthusiastic support of the catalogue and project in general; to Ted Bonin, of Brooke Alexander, New York, for his help in securing loans of artwork, arranging photography, and supplying documentary information; to Laurie Dahlberg, Assistant Director of University Galleries, who edited the catalog essay; and to my assistants: Lisa Bergant, Teresa Downey, Holli Foli, Sue Peterson, and Mary Statzer, who helped in all phases of the exhibition's preparation and installation. Finally, I would like to thank Joseph Nechvatal, for sharing with us his vision of a future already present.

Barry Blinderman, Director  
University Galleries  
February, 1988

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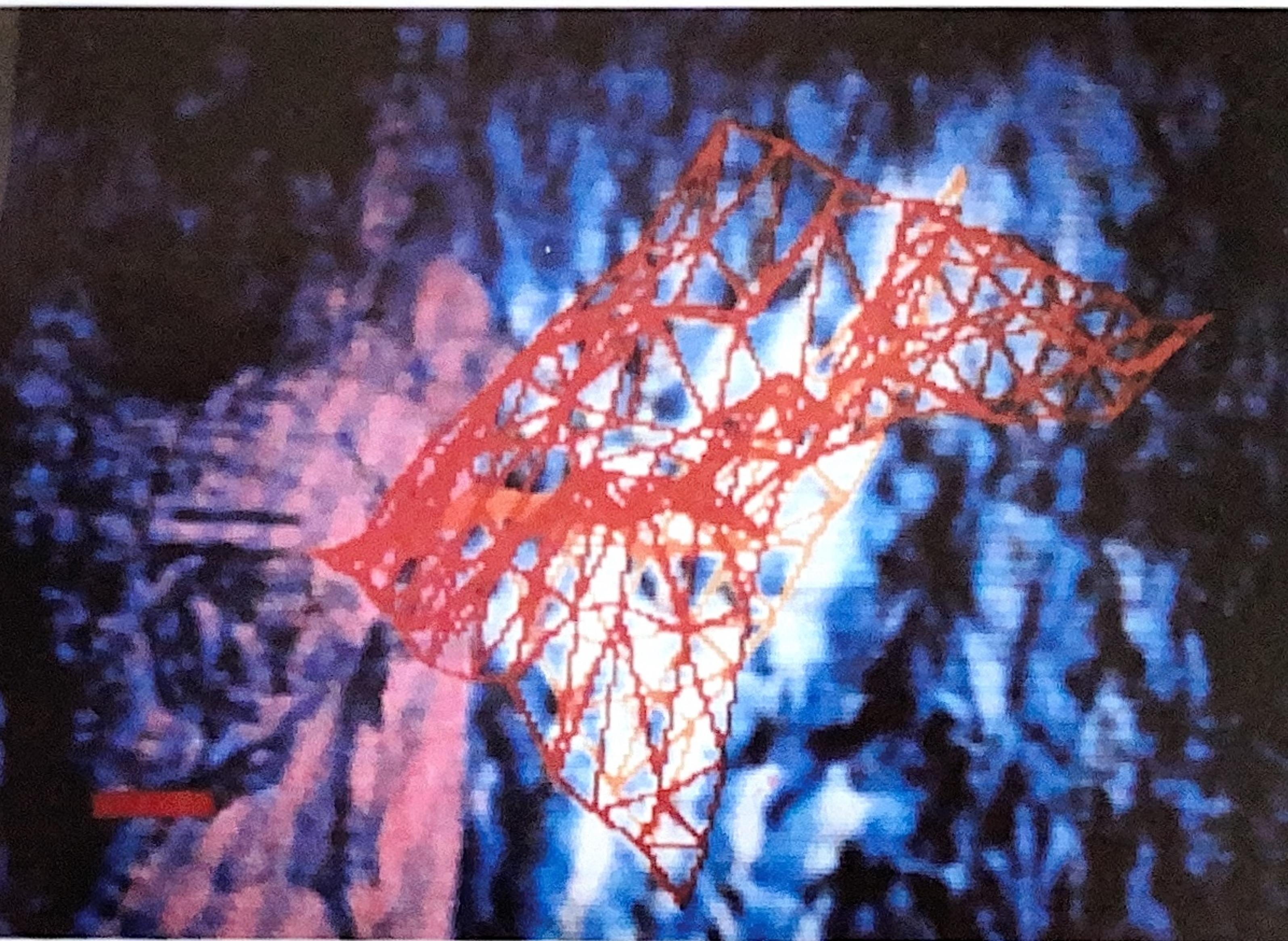
This exhibition and catalogue have been funded in part by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.



*Golden Joy Club*, 1987



*Rare Perfume*, 1987



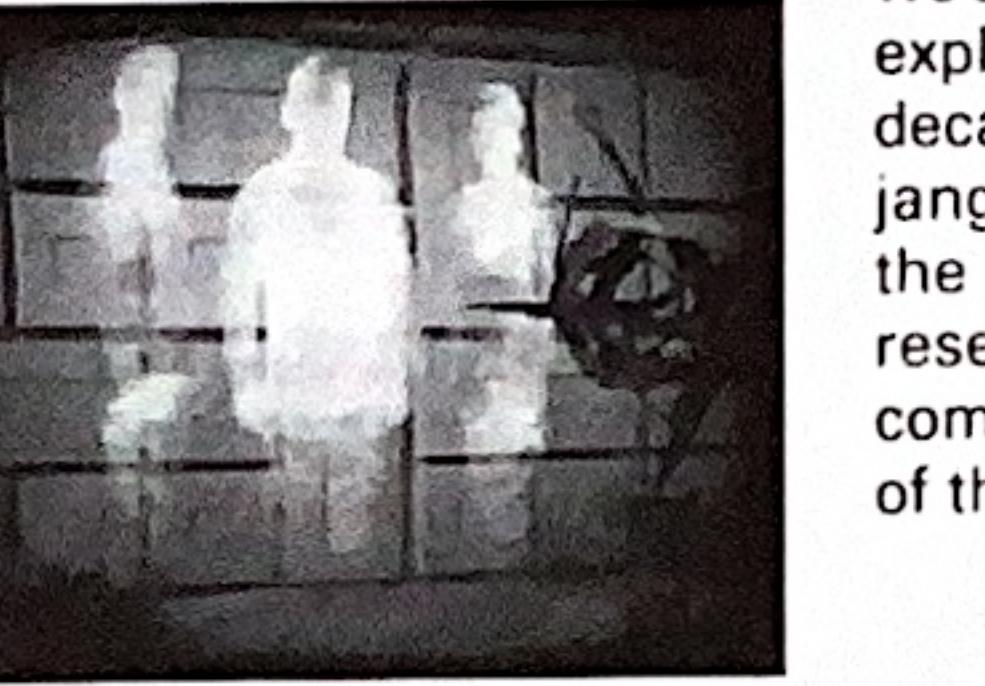
*The Freer*, 1987

## Foreword

I remember as a child, sitting in front of a late 50's tube television, fascinated by no program in particular, but by the hypnotic flickering patterns of light emanating from the screen. When you turned those early sets off, the image became a smaller and smaller rectangle, finally reduced to a lingering dot in the center of the black screen. As that dot slowly faded into nothingness, I tried to perceive the exact moment of its disappearance, which was a futile exercise. I wondered what happened to the picture when everybody's TV was turned off. With no screen to alight upon, where did all those dancing electrons go?

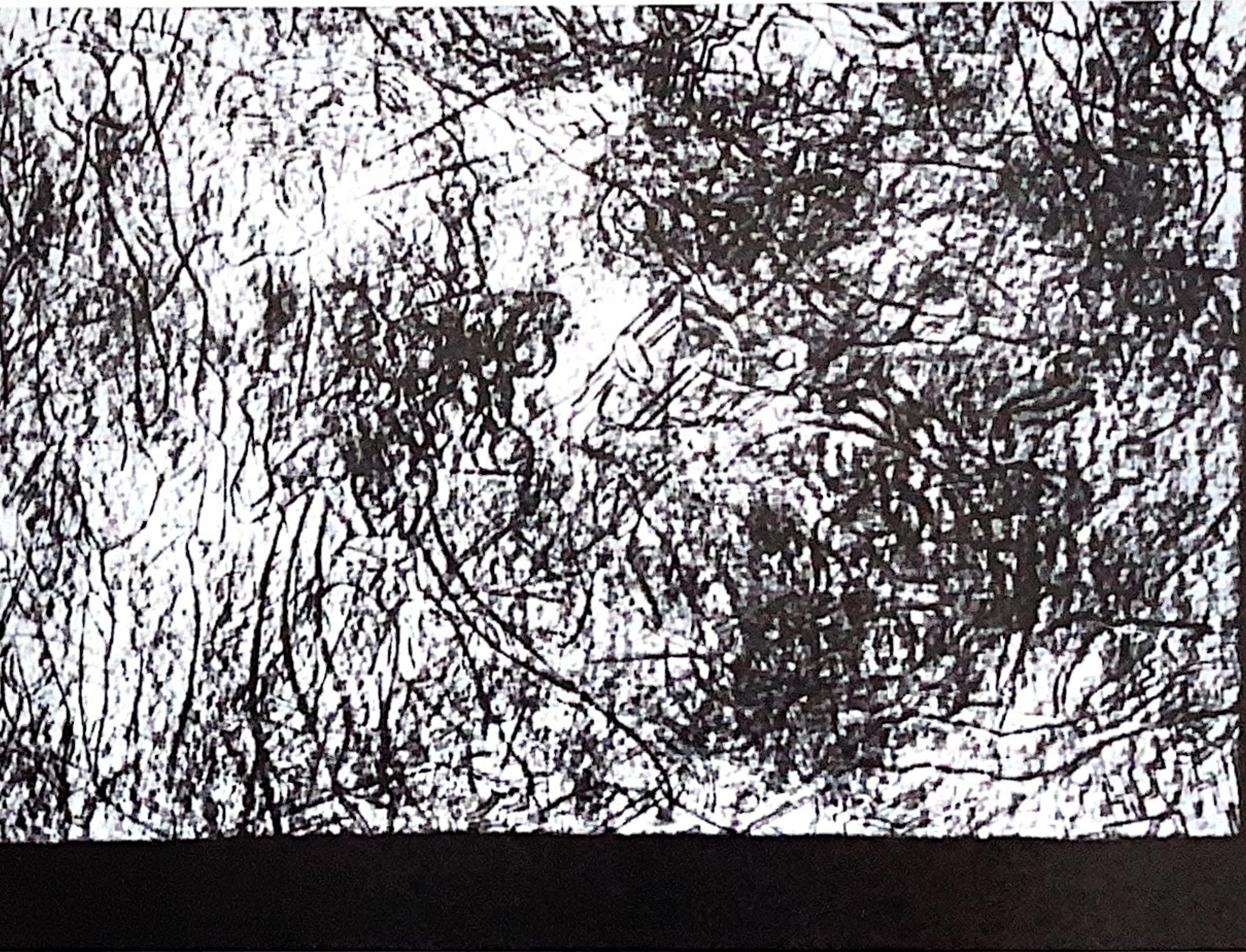
Other memories from that techno-impressionistic period come into view... The Phantom Zone in *Superman* comic books, where Kryptonese convicts were dematerialized by a big ray gun into cosmic limbo, banished forever to incorporeality... Or the popular science fiction notion of early television broadcasts being picked up years later by a civilization light years away, just as

we see the light of some distant star long after the actual star may have exploded. Somewhere in the universe there might be a spot where decades of accumulated TV images commingle, however distorted, jangled and dissipated by collisions with asteroids and warped by the paths of comets. It occurs to me that these images would likely resemble the shimmering, spectral presences of Joseph Nechvatal's computer/robotic assisted paintings. Have I found at last where some of those dancing electrons landed?

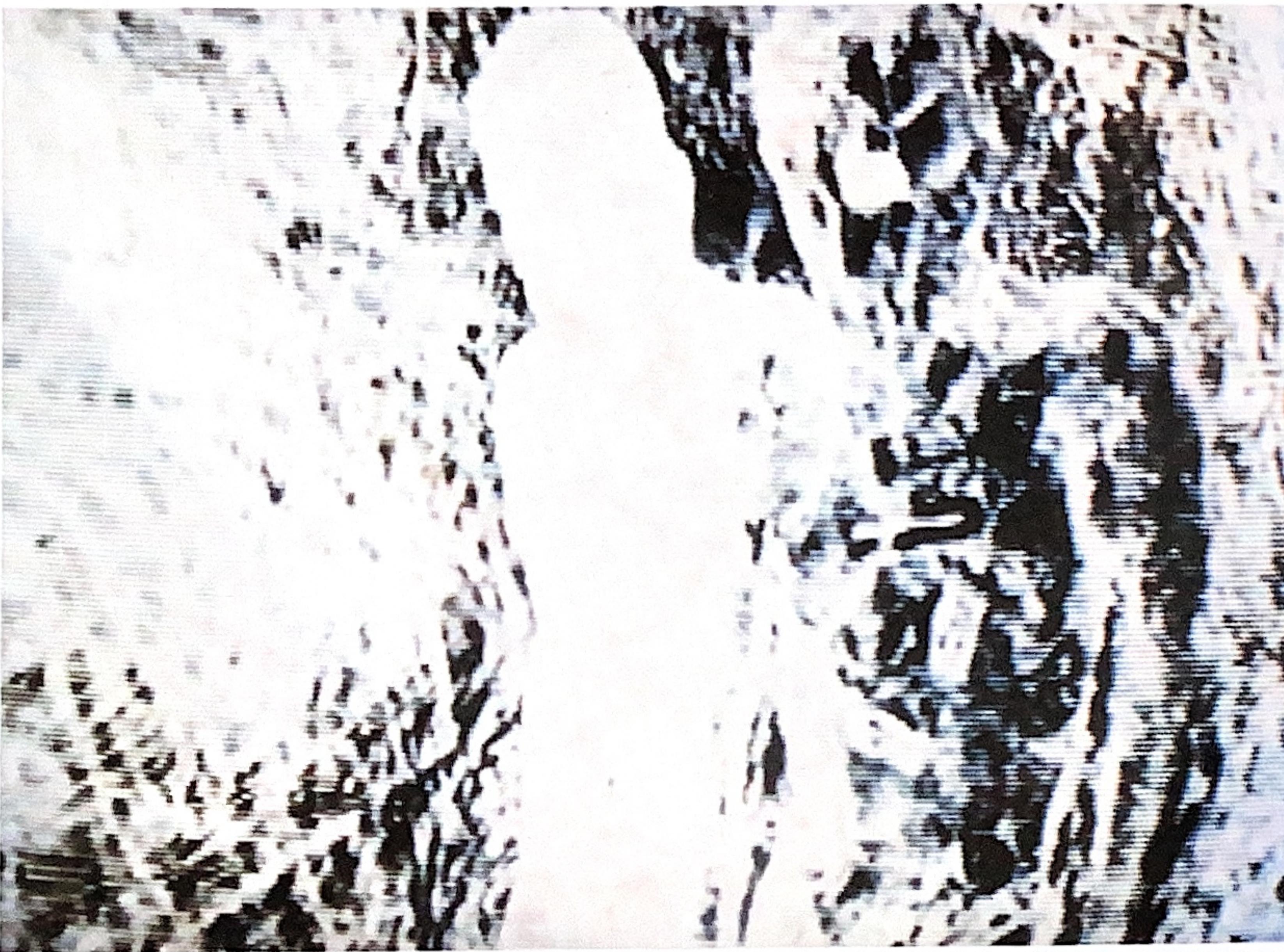


Star Trek, 1966

— B.R.B., February, 1988



Transconceptual Interconnected Causalities, 1986



*Compassion Rules the Destruction of the Regime*, 1986-87

## *The Ghost of Electricity*

by Barry Blinderman

*Is the next step in evolution to be the transformation of man into nothing more than electronic patterns?*

— Alan Watts, *The Book*, 1966

Joseph Nechvatal's recent paintings are eerie dot-matrix apparitions of technology's manifest destiny — the dissolution of boundaries through science. Man creates in his own image: the telephone, television and computer are literal projections of our perceptual and cognitive mechanisms. In effect, the digital/electronics revolution has supplied us with a colossal external nervous system that has radically altered our concepts of space, simultaneity and individuality. With an unprecedented saturation of hallucinatory imagery, the specular regime of television, film and photography transforms society into a phantasmagoria, removing us from the reality of the world while pretending to capture it. Technology, the great equalizer, has achieved through mass-media overload the erasure of difference: images of real horror are neutralized by their coexistence with game shows and liquor advertisements. TV is the most direct form of mind-to-mind communication, delivering the masses wholesale to the corporate sponsors.

*A certain amount of contempt for the material employed to express an idea is indispensable to the purest realization of this idea.*

— Man Ray

Within the confines of a computer-efficient society, scathing visions poke through the glacier of sameness that has advanced upon us. Nechvatal's belief in technology's promised new channels of perception is tempered by his awareness of the accompanying threat of societal/nuclear disintegration. It is this paradox which lends his work its conceptual and political tension. His paintings are, in fact, executed by robotic arms spewing computer-commanded jets of red, yellow, blue and black pigment onto canvases up to twelve feet wide — using the same state of the art process which currently creates advertisement billboards.

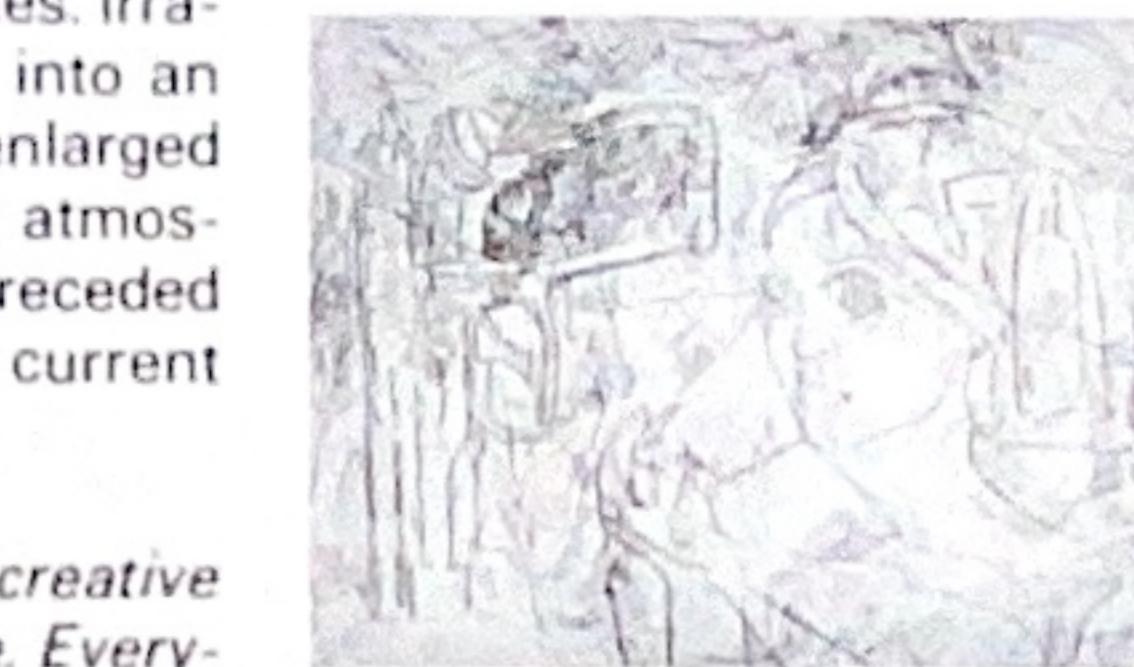


*Plunging Resistance, 1987*

Nechvatal's involvement with media imagery and production tools dates back to 1980 when he began exhibiting intimately scaled graphite drawings comprising saturated, interwoven line tracings of pictures culled from newspapers and magazines. Irrational juxtapositions of images and scale were submerged into an all-over abstract network. He later produced photographically enlarged details of these drawings, onto which he sprayed bands or atmospheric areas of color. Photo-silkscreened images on canvas preceded his use of the computer to digitize, enlarge and "paint" his current work.

*The forms of art are always preformed and meditated. The creative process is always an academic routine and sacred procedure. Everything is prescribed and proscribed. Only in this way is there no grasping or clinging to anything. Only a standard form can be imageless, only a stereotyped image can be formless, only a formularized art can be formulaless.*

— Ad Reinhardt, "Timeless in Asia"



*Just a Thought, 1983*

Nechvatal's working philosophy is akin to Ad Reinhardt's embrace of Eastern concepts of vacuity, repetition and refinement — a quest to push substance to the verge of immateriality. As Reinhardt programmatically erased signs of individual gesture, working in series resembling production lines, Nechvatal distances his touch from the work long before it is digitized by computer and executed by robotic arms. He manipulates his original drawings or photographs through a complex process involving slide projection, re-photography, and video.

Nechvatal's work extends the dimensions of Reinhardt's existential Void through the metaphorical implications of electronic imagery. Ethereal impulses that are transmitted, received, and ultimately left to drift in the far reaches of space are likened to our transient corporeal presence in a continuum of being and nonbeing. Caught in a labyrinthine web of spectral resonance, images emerge and recede like impulses from the pool of the unconscious. The collective wreckage of history is washed ashore on laser-scanned waves. Altimira's urgent talismans move among the shadows of Plato's cave, transforming into new mythologies whose heroes are yet unchosen.

*Today information moves fast, while meaning travels very slowly. The era of information makes less not more sense. But when the meaning of things is lost, when you no longer believe in structures and power, you find yourself in a spiritual state like in Zen, the satori experience, or in any mystical state where the world makes no sense whatever and where a more profound and universal meaning emerges.*

— Joseph Nechvatal, 1987

We receive a superabundance of information via scan lines, whether on TV, computer screens or color reproductions in magazines and billboards. It is fitting that Nechvatal should employ a technique calling attention to information processed line by line to magnify his subversive images to the scale of media. Realizing the degree to which electronic media has infiltrated our dreams and unconscious, he uses the robotic arm as an extension of his own hand, recycling media's detritus and projecting it in a new form before the viewer's eye and mind. The ebb and flow between visible and invisible, between presence and absence, in Nechvatal's paintings suggests the desire to momentarily retrieve and redeem these fleeting images stripped of signification. Yet there is really nothing to clutch and no one to clutch it.

*Whence the smoke arose  
I met one walking, loitering and hurried  
As if blown towards me like metal leaves  
Before the urban dawn unresisting.  
And as I fixed upon the down-turned face  
That pointed scrutiny with which we challenge  
The first-met stranger in the waning dusk  
I caught the sudden look of some dead master  
Whom I had known, forgotten, half recalled  
Both one and many; in the brown baked features  
The eyes of a familiar compound ghost  
Both intimate and unidentifiable.*

— T. S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*, 1943



*The Information Cult's Panopticonic Subject as Decentered Data, 1986*

## *Catalogue of the Exhibition*

*Transconceptual Interconnected Causalities*, 1987  
computer/robotic assisted acrylic on canvas  
64 x 90 inches  
collection of Fred Alger Management, New York

*The Information Cult's Panopticonic Subject as Decentered Data*, 1986  
computer/robotic assisted acrylic on canvas  
97½ x 139 inches  
private collection, New York

*Compassion Rules the Destruction of the Regime*, 1986-87  
computer/robotic assisted acrylic on canvas  
91 x 121 inches  
courtesy of Brooke Alexander, New York

*The Freer*, 1987  
computer/robotic assisted acrylic on canvas  
86 x 125 inches  
courtesy of Brooke Alexander, New York

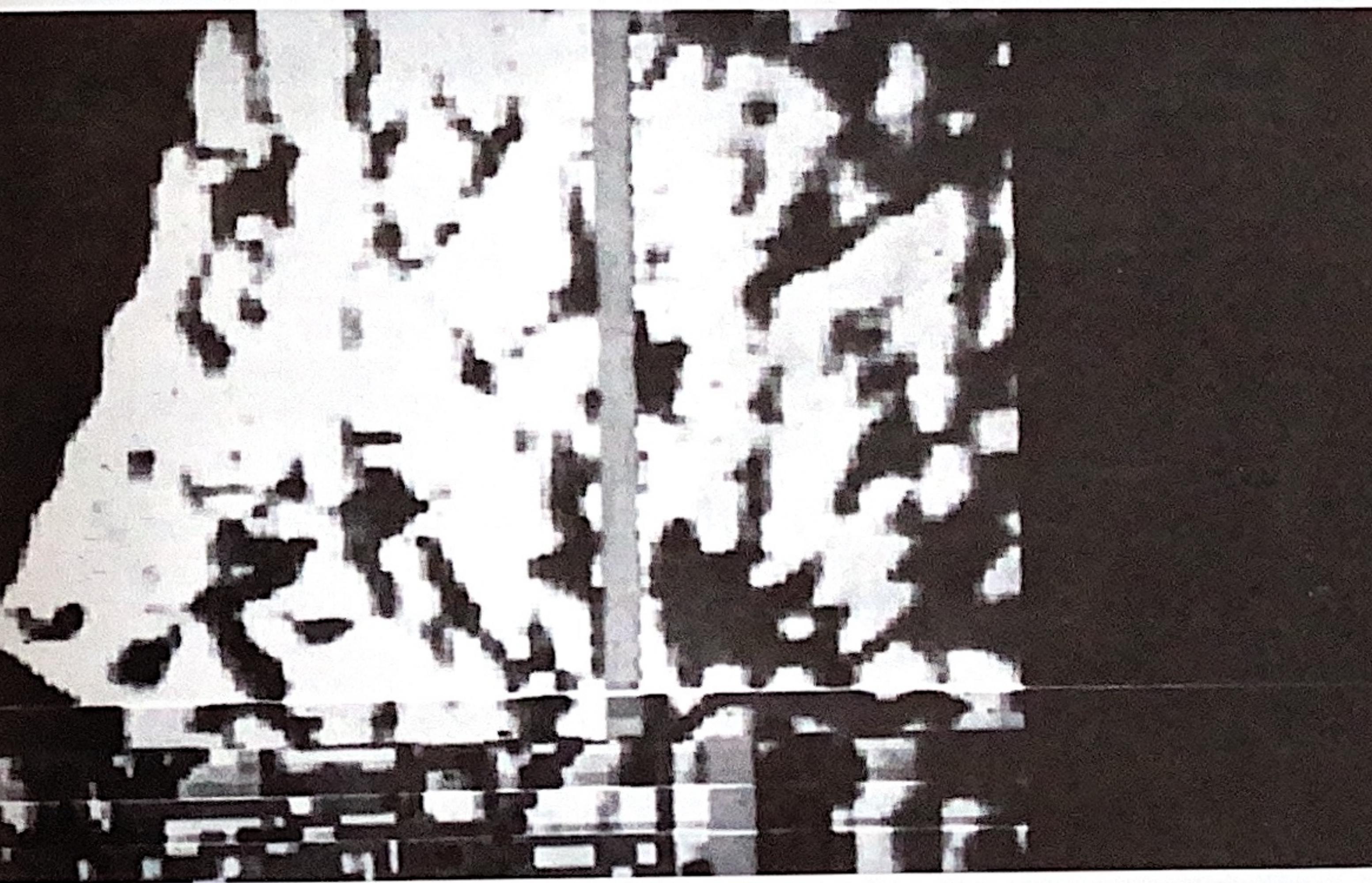
*Rare Perfume*, 1987  
computer/robotic assisted acrylic on canvas  
90 x 132 inches  
Speyer Family collection, New York

*Power Trance Endor*, 1987  
computer/robotic assisted acrylic on canvas  
48 x 74 inches  
collection of Noel Vietor, New York

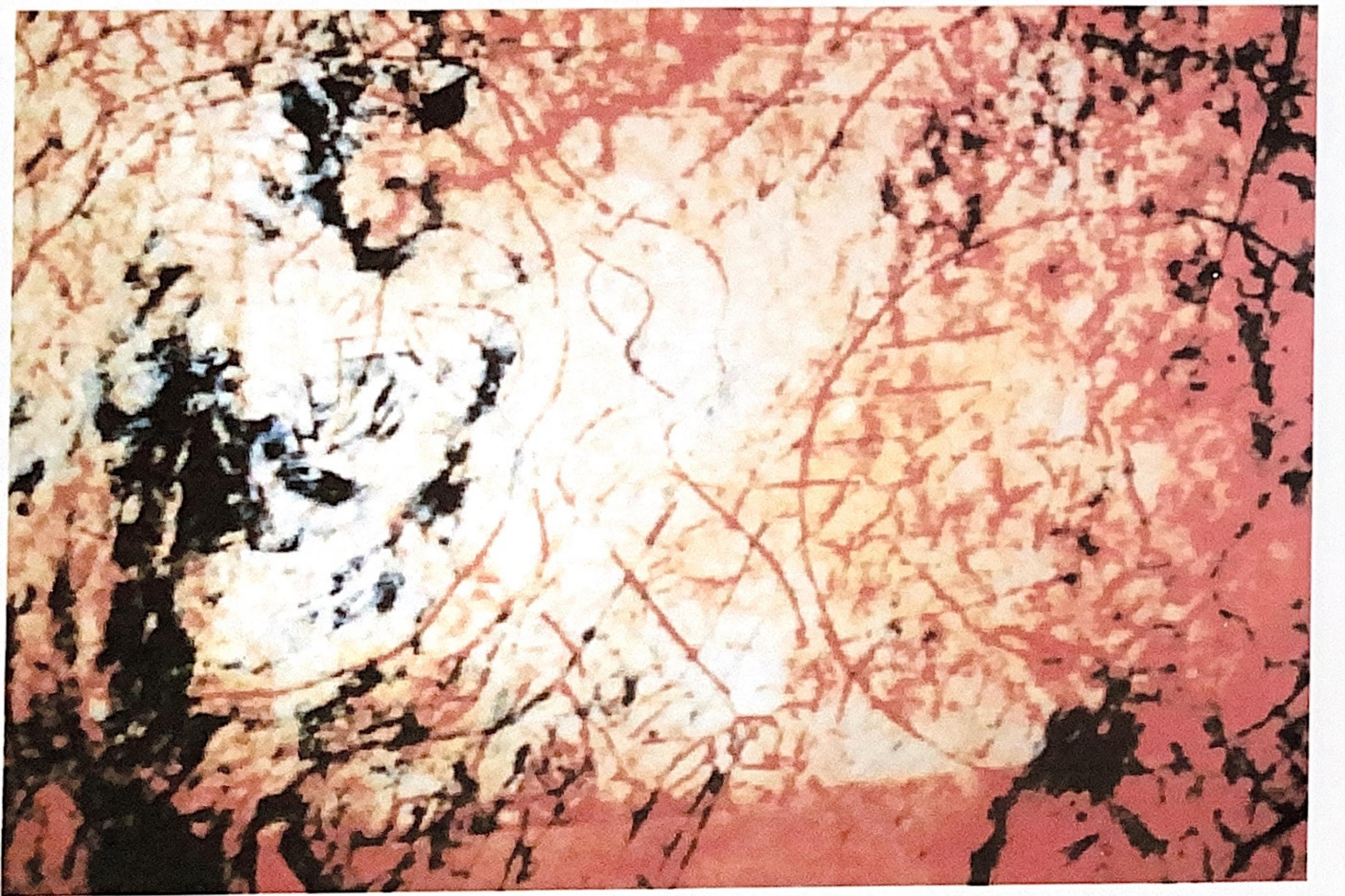
*Plunging Resistance*, 1987  
computer/robotic assisted acrylic on canvas  
96 x 74 inches overall  
courtesy of Brooke Alexander, New York

*Peak*, 1987  
computer/robotic assisted acrylic on canvas  
28 x 46 inches  
courtesy of Brooke Alexander, New York

*Golden Joy Club*, 1987  
computer/robotic assisted acrylic on canvas  
28 x 62½ inches  
courtesy of Brooke Alexander, New York



*Peak*, 1987



*Power Trance Endor, 1987*

## ***Biography***

(b. 1953, Chicago, Illinois, lives in New York City)

### **EDUCATION**

1977-1978 Columbia University  
1974-1975 Cornell University  
1974 BFA, Southern Illinois University

### **SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

1988 University Galleries, Illinois State University, Normal, IL  
De Selby Gallery, Amsterdam  
1987 Galerie Antoine Candau, Paris  
Brooke Alexander, New York  
Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen  
Galleri Engstrom, Stockholm  
1986 Brooke Alexander, New York  
*Maybe Mental*, Greathouse, New York  
Vanguard Gallery, Philadelphia  
Anna Friebe Gallery, Cologne  
1985 Brooke Alexander, New York  
Anders Tornberg Gallery, Lund  
*XS: An Installation*, Gray Art Gallery, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC  
1984 Brooke Alexander, New York  
*Photographs by Joseph Nechvatal*, Nature Morte, New York  
1983 Spiritual America, New York  
1982 Real Art Ways, Hartford, CT  
*When Things Get Rough on Easy Street*, The Kitchen, New York

### **SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

1988 *Committed to Print*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
1987 *Chemical Field*, De Zaak, Groningen, The Netherlands  
*Digital Visions: Computers and Art*, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY  
*New Coordinates*, Simard, Hahn & Shie Gallery, Los Angeles, CA  
*Eye of a Storm: 31 Artist-Photographers from the Lower East Side*, Photo Galery, Tokyo  
*Documenta 8*, Kassel  
*New York Scene*, Galerie Liesbeth Lips, Amsterdam  
*Glasnost, Neun Künstler aus New York*, Internationalgalerie Maria Bonk, Cologne  
*This Is Not a Photograph: Twenty Years of Large-Scale Photography*, John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, FL  
1986-1987 *Drawings from the Collection of Dorothy and Herbert Vogel*, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, (traveling)  
*Il Cangiante*, Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan  
1985-1987 *Infotainment*, Texas Gallery, Houston; Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago; Vanguard Galerry, Philadelphia; Aspen Art Museum; De Selby Gallery, Amsterdam; Gallerie Montenay-Desol Paris,  
1986 *Art on Paper*, Weatherspoon Art Galerry, University of North Carolina, Greensboro  
*Spiritual America*, CEPA, Buffalo, NY  
*Pay Attention*, Brandts Palkhus Galeri, Copenhagen  
*Drawings*, Piezo Electric, New York

1985-1986 *Time After Time*, Diane Brown Gallery, New York  
*Face It!*, Anders Tornberg Gallery, Lund  
*Drawings*, Knight Gallery, Spirit Square Arts Center, Charlotte  
*Cultural Commentary*, The Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, MA  
*New York Art Now: Correspondences*, Laforet Museum, Tokyo  
1985 *Anniottanta*, Castel Sismondo, Palazzina Moste, Chiesa di Santa Maria ad Nives, Rimini  
*Whitney Biennial*, Group Material, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York  
*Memento Mori*, Moore College of Art Gallery, Philadelphia  
*DRAWING: Paintings and Sculpture*, Brooke Alexander, New York  
*Prints and Drawings*, Reynolds-Minor Gallery, Richmond, Virginia  
*Smart Art, New Work from New York*; Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA  
1984 *Disarming Images: Art for Nuclear Disarmament*, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati  
*Artists' Weapons: A Response to the Arms Build Up*, Ted Greenwald Gallery, Inc., New York  
*Via Satellite*, Amerika-Haus, Cologne  
*Natural Genre*, Fine Arts Gallery, School of Visual Arts, Florida State University  
*The New Capital*, White Columns, New York  
*Drawings by Contemporary American Figurative Artists*, Meyerhoff Gallery, Maryland Institute, Baltimore  
*Humanism: An Undercurrent*, University of Southern Florida, Tampa  
*Romance and Catastrophe*, Piezo Electric, New York

1983 *Contemporary Perspectives*, Center Gallery, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA  
*Motives*, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY  
*New York New: 26 Artisti*, Nello Studio di Corrado Levi Corso San Gottardo, Milan  
*Dessins*, Gillespie-Laage Salomon, Paris  
*Small Works*, Semaphore Gallery, New York  
*New York 1 Dag*, Nordjyllands Kunstmuseum, Aalborg. Traveled to Randers Kunstmuseum  
*Joseph Nechvatal and Richard Tobias*, Brooke Alexander, New York  
*Contemporary Drawings*, Barbara Krakow, Boston  
*Cara Perlman/Joseph Nechvatal*, Semaphore Gallery, New York  
*Four New York Artists*, Jack Tilton Gallery, New York  
*Rotating Group Show*, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York  
*Speed Trials*, White Columns, New York  
*Joseph Nechvatal/Not Vital/Robin Weglinski*, Gallery Nature Morte, New York  
*The Ritz*, a Collaborative Project, WPA, Washington, D.C.  
1982 *Paper*, Semaphore Gallery, New York  
*The Atomic Salon*, Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York  
*Artists on Nuclear War*, Nexus Gallery, Atlanta  
*The Occult Power of Technology: Part II*, P.S. 1, Long Island City  
*The Occult Power of Technology I*, The Drawing Center, New York  
*The Suitcase Show*, Collaborative Projects, Seattle  
*The Colab Show*, Antwerp, Belgium  
*The Absurdity Show*, ABC No Rio, New York

1980 *Collaborative Projects*, Brooke Alexander, New York  
*Times Square Show*, New York  
*Salsa N'Colors Painting Show*, Solidaridad School, PS 160, New York  
*The Doctors and Dentists Show*, 591 Broadway, New York  
1981 **SELECTED INSTALLATIONS AND PERFORMANCES**  
1987 *Not a Door, A Spectacle by Scott B. Billingsly and Joseph Nechvatal*, Hallwalls, Buffalo  
1986 *XS: The Opera*, Brattle Performance Series, Boston Shakespeare Theatre, Boston  
1985 *The End of the Night*, Los Angeles County Art Museum, Los Angeles  
*Night of Power*, with Rhys Chatham, 8 BC, New York  
1984 *XS, The Opera Opus* by Rhys Chatham and Joseph Nechvatal, Performances: Pyramid Club, Danceteria, 8 BC and Dannheiser Foundation, New York  
1983 *Isle of Dread*, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, 71 Broadway and 120 Broadway, New York  
*Future Vikings*, 93 Prince Street, New York  
1982 *Blame it on the Brain*, Zippers Night Club, New York  
1981 *Contemporary Psychedelia*, (Slide Show), Inroads, New York and Desire Productions, Baltimore, Maryland  
*Free Speech on Broadway Performance*, Performance of "Trouble Light 1980" with Carol Parkinson and Cid Collins, New York  
1978 *European Art-Performance Tour*, Centre of Experimental Theatre, Antwerp, Belgium; Ecole D'Architecture, Tournai, Belgium; Theatre on

the Rijn, Arnhem, Performance of *Trouble Light, For Raymond and Political Talk*  
**SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**  
1988 McCormick, Carlo. "Joseph Nechvatal," *Artforum*, March  
Morgan, Robert. "Joseph Nechvatal," *Arts Magazin*  
Hoog, Eckhard. "Im Dschungel der Bilder Joseph Nechvatal im Aachener Kunsteiern," *Aachener Volkszeitung*, May 22.  
Levi, Corrado. "Joseph Nechvatal," *Cover*, February.  
Lottman, Joachim. "Documenta-Eindrücke vor der Eroffnung," *Wolkenkratzer Art Journal*, June/July/August.  
Malsch, Friedemann. "Joseph Nechvatal Galerie Anna Friebe, Köln 8-31.10.1986," *Kunstforum*, January.  
Stiffrin-Peters, Annette. "Gewirr aus feinen Linien Documenta-Teilnehmer Nechvatal vorab in Aachen zu sehen," *Aachener Nachrichten*, May 22.  
McCormick, Carlo. "Joseph Nechvatal," *Uksund Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 1.  
1986 Collins, Tricia and Milazzo, Richard. "Joseph Nechvatal: Grace Under Pressure," *Differentia*, Fall.  
\_\_\_\_\_. "New York: Tropical Codes," *Kunstforum*, March.  
Larson, Kay. "The Flash of Truth," *New York Magazine*, October 27.  
Levin, Kim. "Joseph Nechvatal," *The Village Voice*, October 14.  
\_\_\_\_\_. "Artwalk," *The Village Voice*, October 21.  
McCormick, Carlo. "Cross-Breeding Art," *Paper*, September

Raab, Gurgen. "Humanisierung der Technik; Joseph Nechvatal bei Anna Friebe" *Der Kölner*, November.

1985 Collins, Tricia, and Milazzo, Richard. "The New Sleep: Stasis and the Image-Bound Environment," *Art Journal*, Fall.

Crary, Jonathan. "Joseph Nechvatal at Brooke Alexander," *Art in America*, January.

Pincus-Witten, Robert. "The New Irascibles," *Arts*, September.

Raynor, Vivian. "Joseph Nechvatal—Judy Rifka," *The New York Times*, October 18.

1984 Brooks, Rosetta. "Interview-Rhys Chatham & Joseph Nechvatal," *ZG*(#12).

Cotter, Holland. "Joseph Nechvatal," *Arts*, November.

DeAk, Edit. "The Critic Sees through the Cabbage Patch," *Artforum*, April.

Fisher, Jean. "Joseph Nechvatal," *Artforum*, January.

Glueck, Grace. "Joseph Nechvatal," *The New York Times*, September 21.

Jones, Ronald. "Joseph Nechvatal," *Arts*.

Kleyn, Robert. "Protective Mimicry," *Vanguard*, March.

—. "The Shadow Reflected," *ZG*.

Kuspit, Donald. "Joseph Nechvatal," *Artforum*, December.

Levin, Kim. "Art: Body Politics," *The Village Voice*, May 9-15.

Masheck, Joseph. *Smart Art: Point I/Visual Arts*. New York: Willis, Locker and Owens.

Robinson, Walter and Carlo McCormick. "Slouching Toward Avenue D," *Art in America*, Summer.

1983 Fine, Kimberly. "Joseph Nechvatal," *East Village Eye*, October 15.

Levin, Kim. "The Shock of the Old," *The Village Voice*, September 27.

McCormick, Carlo. "Joseph Nechvatal," *New York Beat*, December.

1982 Lawson, Thomas. "Joseph Nechvatal (The Kitchen)," *Artforum*, April.

Schoenfeld, Ann. "Paper," *Arts Magazine*, Oct.

**SELECTED ARTICLES BY THE ARTIST**

1987 "A Prophylactic Discourse on Simulated Art," *C Magazine*, Toronto, Fall; *Code*, Amsterdam, December.

"Post-Simulation Decadence," *Arts*, Summer.

"Simulation & Sublimination: The Law is for All," *Unsound Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 1.

"Superfacts," *Effects*, #3; *Spectacle*, #4, 1986.

"High Style," *Arts*, April.

1986 "Theoretical Drawing Statement," *White Walls* #13, Spring.

"State of the Art/Art of the State," *Spectacle*, Fall.

1985 "Holding Out the Promise of Pure Regression," *New Observations* #28.

1983 "Epic Images and Contemporary History," *Real*

1984 *Life Magazine* #11/12, Winter.

1979 "Untitled," *White Walls* #3, Fall.

**PUBLIC COLLECTIONS**

Beijer Collection, Stockholm

Dannheisser Foundation, New York

Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Malmo Konsthall, Stockholm

Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Museum of Modern Art, New York

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